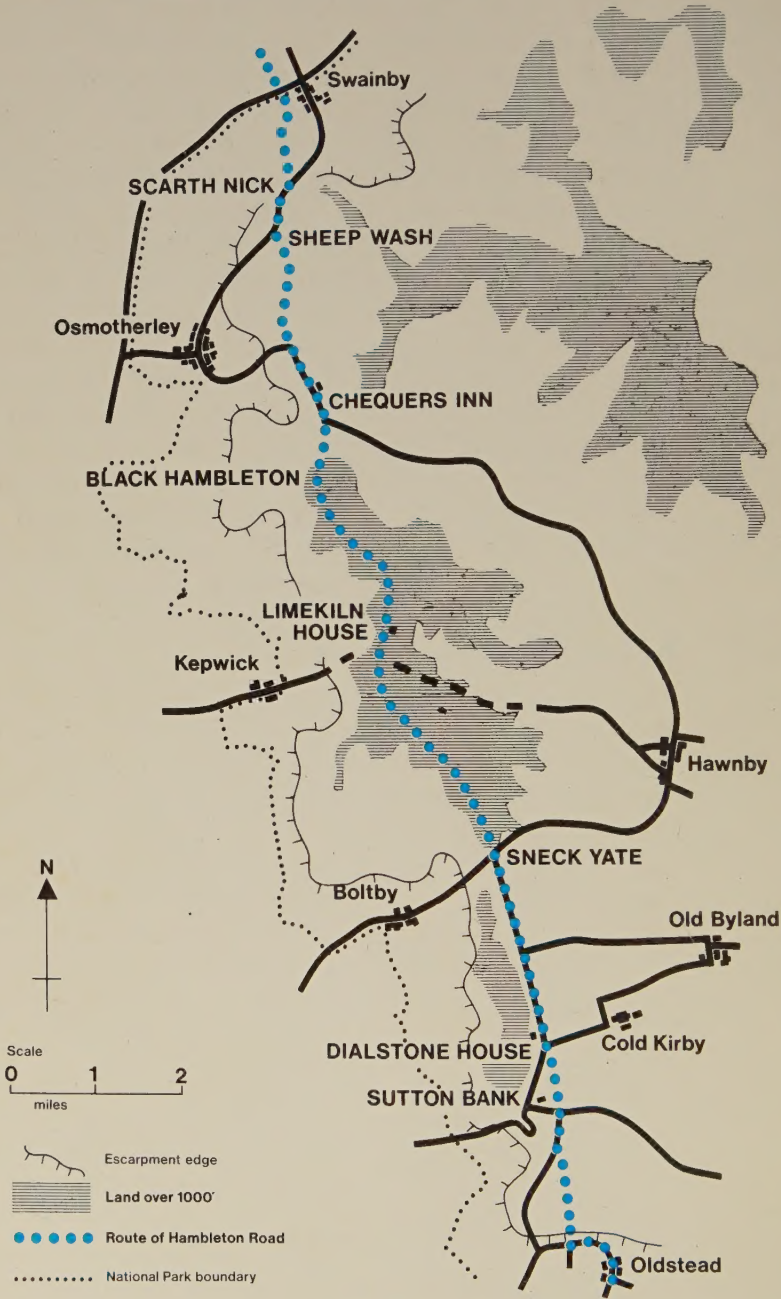


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# THE HAMBLETON DROVE ROAD



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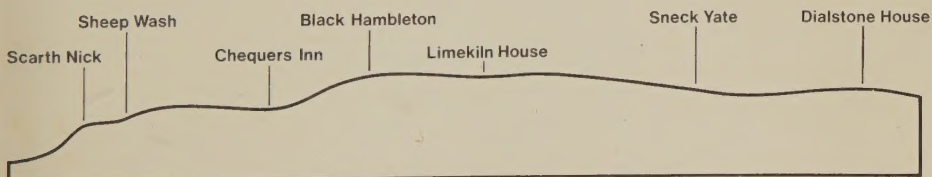
## ANCIENT HIGHWAY

The Hambleton Road is part of an ancient highway running from the south of England to Scotland. Approaching north east Yorkshire from the north, the route crossed the River Tees at Yarm and passing through Crathorne it climbed steeply onto the moors through Scarth Nick, south of Swainby. It ran roughly south for 15 miles over the Hambleton Hills to Sutton Bank, where it forked, one way continuing southwards through Oldstead and Coxwold to York. The other route turned eastwards, roughly along the present A170 to Tom Smith's Cross where it descended to Ampleforth High Street and on to Malton. Turning southwards to Brough, where there was a ford across the Humber, it then continued over the Lincolnshire Wolds and on to the south. Much of the route is now incorporated into the modern road system but parts of the Hambleton section remain as a rough moorland track with evidence of former travellers still to be found alongside.

## RIDGEWAYS

The first men hunting in an area would probably use existing animal tracks but once they started making their own paths, ridges and high ground generally provided the best routes. Low ground would be swampy and overgrown, the higher ground, although still rough, would be relatively drier with less vegetation, affording wider views for safety. Running near the western edge of the Hambleton Hills, the Road is a fine example of an ancient ridgeway.

Ridge Profile



## STONE AGE

There is no evidence of Old Stone Age man (Paleolithic) along the Road, or indeed elsewhere on the North York Moors and the earliest remains are from the Middle Stone Age (Mesolithic) period. Nomadic hunters of the later mesolithic period (7000-3000 B.C.) hunted and camped in the area and their tiny flints, known as microliths are found on the high ground. Although this is now open moorland, analysis of pollen found with the flints shows that these early people were living in a forest. Archaeologists suggest that they may have begun the destruction of the forest by clearing and burning.

The Neolithic or New Stone Age (3000-1800 B.C.) brought the beginnings of cultivation, more forest clearing, pottery and improved stone tools. Evidence of these people is found mainly on the limestone hills in the southern fringe of the National Park, and particularly at the eastern end on the Hambletons. One of the few burial mounds of this period to be found in the North York Moors, is alongside the Road above Kepwick.

## BRONZE AGE (1800-500 B.C.)

Early in the Bronze Age came the Beaker people, so called from their pottery. They may well have entered the area along the old highway from Brough, many sites have been found near the route and on the Yorkshire Wolds. One of their burial mounds close to the Road was opened in the mid 19th century and revealed decorated vessels of good quality and the remains of a jet necklace. Round burial mounds of the various cultures throughout the Bronze Age are found in great numbers on the North York Moors and the Hambleton Road area is no exception. They are also known as round barrows, tumuli and howes.

## IRON AGE (500 B.C.-50 A.D.)

On the edge of the escarpment at Boltby was an iron age promontary fort, now badly damaged by modern farming. Finds here cover a wide period of history and indicate a continued use of the Road and its locality.



There are a remarkable series of earthworks and dikes running alongside or crossing the southern part of the Road. Many questions remain unanswered regarding them, as they have not been thoroughly investigated by archaeologists. Some are assumed to be of the iron age, others could be Romano—British and possibly Medieval — Monastic. It is interesting to note that another ancient ridgeway on the Yorkshire Wolds has similar dikes intersecting it.

### ROMAN PERIOD (50-400 A.D.)

The Road is often known as the “Hambleton Street” and this suggests a Roman road but it was certainly never a paved military road. This does not mean it was not used, in fact Roman remains have been found at both the northern and southern ends. A Roman pottery kiln was found near Oldstead and pottery and coins (4th-5th century) at Whorlton near the northern descent.

Scarth Nick



## SAXONS AND NORSEMEN

After the Roman withdrawal, records are scant, but notice the number of place-names along the foot of the Hambletons ending in "by", indicating a Scandinavian settlement. There is Thirlby, Boltby, Cowesby, Swainby and also Hawnby to the east. Scarth Nick, the glacial meltwater channel at the northern end, derives its name from an old Norse word meaning gap or notch. Above Hawnby, on Sunny Bank, a rich Saxon burial was found, the mound contained bronze, silver and gold ornaments with the skeleton of a young woman.

## NORMANS

Following the invasion of 1066, uprisings in the north were violently quelled by William the Conqueror and his army in 1069, when many townships in the north were reduced to 'waste' as recorded in the later Domesday Book. Chroniclers of the day tell us that returning from a campaign around Durham and Tees-side to winter in York, William and a few of his escort were separated from the main body of his army in an over-night snowstorm on the moors. This could have happened in Bilsdale but it is more probable that they were using the Hambleton Road, a direct route to York, at the time. Even to this century the phrases "swearing like Billy Norman" and "when Billy Norman kep' hissen warm wi 'swearin'" have been heard locally. Does this royal use of the Road have any connection with Rievaulx Abbey documents of the early 13th century referring to the Road as Via Regalis, meaning Kings Way or Royal Road, or were there other royal travellers?

## BATTLE OF BYLAND ABBEY

Yet another unsolved historical problem relating to the Road, occurred in 1322. The Road would undoubtedly have been used by the Scots in their various raids on north east England but in 1322 Edward II made an unsuccessful attempt to invade Scotland. With his army in a sorry state due to sickness and lack of supplies Edward was forced to with-



draw, possibly down the road, for he reached Byland Abbey (some say Rievaulx) and sent for reinforcements. He was quartered at the abbey and he posted his fit men on a nearby hill top. The Scots, meanwhile, under Robert Bruce, followed him south and found time to sack and burn several townships in Cleveland and possibly Northallerton but caught up with Edward's troops on their hill. The Scots attacked from below, so if they were coming across from Northallerton it is very possible that the hill in question was Sutton Bank. It does seem a likely place for Edward to post his army, a good vantage point over the plain to the west and on the Hambleton Road, a possible route for the Scots to take. Frontal attacks up the hill by the Scots failed but they then found an easier route round the English flank, routed the English army and forced Edward to flee first to York and then Bridlington, in such panic that he left behind jewels and treasure. The out flanking way up the hill would be from Oldstead, assuming it did take place at Sutton Bank, and 'Scotch Corner' is still marked on the maps on this track.

## MEDIEVAL

The road continued as a main thoroughfare throughout the Middle Ages and the five monasteries, of varying importance, very near to it would add both to its travellers and goods traffic. Most loads were initially carried by pack animals but slowly these were being replaced by the cart and wagon throughout the country, and wheeled vehicles required a better road surface than that available after the constant tramp of animal hooves, without proper maintenance.

## TURNPIKES AND TOLL ROADS

Initially the responsibility for road maintenance lay with each parish. From the middle of the 16th Century each landowner was required to spend first 4 and later 6 days each year on the roads of his parish, but this ill-enforced law was superseded by turnpikes long before it was legally ended in 1835. The setting up of turnpikes or toll gates along the roads enabled money,

collected from the road users, to be spent in improving the surfaces. The first turnpike was set up in 1663 and hundreds followed in the next century all over the countryside. The road from York to Coxwold is shown as a turnpike as far north as Oldstead on 18th century maps, but the Hambleton section remained in its old rough state, and so lost its significance as a main thoroughfare as the increasing coach, carriage and waggon transport used the better surfaced toll roads. Turnpikes did not, however, please all the road users, local people disliked paying to move their vehicles and stock for short distances and in some parts of the country there were riots when mobs tore down the toll gates. The other main sufferers were the drovers, moving large numbers of beasts over great distances, the toll roads proved time consuming and costly. At each gate the beasts were counted through, one at a time. The count went 'yan, taen, tethera, ertera, pip,' and so to twenty, — a score, when a mark of some kind was made, maybe a cut in a stick, before the oral count began again to the next score. A lengthy business, with gates sometimes only 7 miles apart and herds of several hundreds, and costly too. Prices varied, but in 1759 it was about 10d per score for cattle and this had risen to 1s 6d in 1839. Cross country travel over open land was restricted by the many miles of walls and hedges that steadily increased as more and more land was "enclosed". Small wonder the drovers sought routes away from the turnpikes and so the Hambleton Road with its wide verges and many other similar ridgeways and tracks had a new lease of life as Drovers Roads.

## DROVING

Droving was by no means restricted to the 18th and 19th century, but reached its peak during that period. Among the early travellers on the Road, and similar old tracks, men were moving their cattle and sheep from settlements to lower pastures. Many old tracks would owe their existence to the need to seek new pastures and of course change of ownership of the animals. The establishment of fairs and markets in



medieval times brought a regular flow of animal movement, locally at first and then from further afield to the larger markets.

In addition to the lawful movements, there was a lot of cattle thieving, especially in the wilder, isolated regions, and many of the earlier drovers were regarded as little more than thieves or vagabonds. There are various references to drovers from the 14th Century onwards. Wales and Scotland and later Ireland were the main sheep and cattle producers, and their animals were brought to England for fattening and subsequent sale at the markets and fairs. In Tudor times annual licences were issued to drovers, they had to be married house holders of over 30 years of age and their licence was signed by three justices of the peace, and so droving became a growing and respectable occupation.

## THE DROVERS

The drovers using the Hambleton Road were mainly Scottish bringing cattle to Malton and York markets, and some would be going on to Lincolnshire and further south. The East Riding provided good pasture for fattening cattle which could then be sold for provisioning ships at Hull and other ports. A good drover required many skills, he had to know the countryside along his route and be able to regulate his travel and rest days to get the herd to the market on time but in good condition. Once at the market he needed business skills to get the best prices for his stock. He also needed to be capable of protecting himself and his herd from attack by outlaws or cattle thieves and was always armed. Scottish drovers usually purchased the beasts from the farmer, sometimes for cash, others by credit, when the result of the sale of the herd played an important part in their ability to meet their bills. The Welsh system usually meant the breeder trusted the drover to sell his beasts and return with the money.

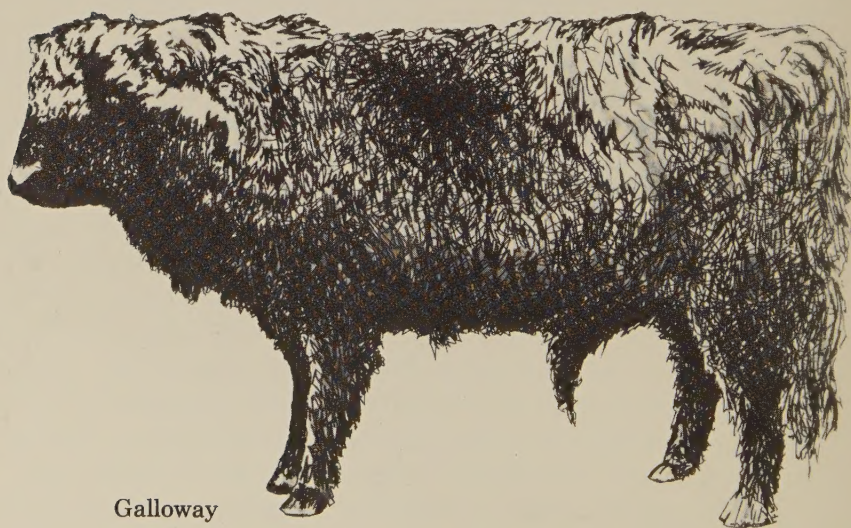
Passing through isolated communities, the drovers were usually welcomed by the local people. They brought news of the outside world, such as the victory

at Waterloo, and they frequently carried letters or performed errands elsewhere along their route or at the market at their destination.

A good dog was essential to them when controlling the herds. They usually had collies, and the dogs were sometimes released to find their own way home at the end of the drove, if the owner was delayed by other business. The dogs would return by the drove route and were fed and housed at droving inns and farms where the drover had stopped, and he paid for their keep on his next journey south.

## CATTLE

The two main cattle breeds from Scotland were the Galloway and the West Highland. The Galloway was a dark brown or black animal without horns (polled), and the West Highlands were smaller, shaggy coated, very hardy beasts with long curved horns. The more usual name for the West Highlands were Kyloes and this may be because they frequently had to swim the narrow stretches of water around the Scottish west coast, called 'Kyles'. In her diary of 1802, Dorothy Wordsworth commented "the little Scotch cattle panted and tossed fretfully about" when describing



Galloway



Sutton Bank during a walk from Thirsk to Helmsley, with her brother, the poet William Wordsworth. In the middle 18th century over 30,000 Scottish cattle crossed into England each year and the trade steadily increased over the following century. At that time about 75,000 were sold annually at Smithfield Market in London, and although these were from Scotland, Wales and various other sources too, equally a great many were slaughtered all around the country and never reached the London markets. The overall increase can be seen by comparing the Smithfield figure with the one for 1864 which quotes 210,757 cattle. Besides the cattle, vast flocks of sheep were moved and in lesser numbers, pigs, geese and turkeys. Some Scottish and Irish drovers took donkeys on their return journey to S.W. Scotland from where they were shipped to Ireland. A history of Thirsk in 1823 comments on the number of geese in the streets. In addition to avoiding the costs of the turnpikes, the old roads with their wide verges inflicted less wear on the animals hooves. The hooves did need protection for long journeys and a thriving shoeing trade grew up along the drovers routes. Cattle were regularly shod, each animal requiring eight shoes because of its cloven hooves.



West Highland

## THE DECLINE OF DROVING

The increasing demands for beef in the towns of England was due to the increasing industrial populations but it was another aspect of the Industrial Revolution that brought droving to an end — the Railways. As the network of lines grew throughout the 19th Century it became much easier and quicker to dispatch the animals by rail and the speed of travel enabled the breeder to slaughter his beasts locally and send the carcasses to the markets. Improved agricultural methods produced better grazing, so the need to fatten cattle elsewhere was removed.

Similar advances were made in shipping, faster passages were made in the steam ships, meat was imported from further afield through the development of freezing techniques and freezer ships.

From a rapidly growing occupation at the start of the 19th Century, droving had ceased by the start of the 20th Century, and only on very short distances were cattle moved on foot.

## HORSE RACING

Alongside the Hambleton Road at its southern end was the Hambleton Race Ground. Racing took place here from about 1613 until 1776, and it was regarded as the Newmarket of the north. Both Queen Anne and George I gave gold cups to be competed for at Hambleton and the district produced some famous trainers and jockeys. It is interesting to note that Hesketh which is just north of the race course site, is from the old Norse word for Racecourse which may imply a considerably earlier association with the sport. There are still racing stables in operation and the gallops cut across the old Road. Race goers would have used either the Hambleton Inn or the Dialstone Inn. The unusual name for the latter is said to be derived from the dial or weighing machine used to weigh in the jockeys. In the wall opposite Dialstone House, now a farm house, is a large flat stone on which the weighing machine is said to have stood.





Chequers Inn (now a farm)

## LIMESTONE

Lime carrying was another important aspect of the road's traffic. The Hambleton oolite was very suitable for lime burning. Quarries and limekilns are plentiful along its length south of Black Hambleton. The trade was centred on Limekiln House, another of the Road's inns, which catered for the thirsty quarrymen and carters as well as the drovers. The lime was carried along the road by pack ponies and donkeys and later by bullock cart in the 18th Century and the trade continued until late in the 19th century. Iron was also carried by pack horse from the numerous bloomeries in the Upper Ryedale and Rievaulx district up to the mid 17th century.

## TODAY

Both the northern and southern sections of the road are now metalled and carry motor traffic, but the middle section from the northern slopes of Black

Hambleton to Sneck Yat, where it crosses the Boltby-Hawnby Road, is still a rough track and is ideal for walkers. In fact it is part of the long distance footpath from Helmsley to Filey, called "The Cleveland Way".

Of the four inns available to the drovers, only one is still in business, The Hambleton Inn, its customers now use the A170 or the Cleveland Way. Dialstone, as mentioned in the horse racing, is a farm house, and the former Limekiln House, and its cattle stance are now reduced to piles of debris along the roadside. The remaining inn 'Chequers' is also a farm, serving soft drinks to travellers on the Hawnby-Osmotherley road, which uses a section of the old Road.

The old inn sign can still just be seen on the wall. A chequer board and underneath the inscription:

*Be not in haste; Step in and taste;  
Good ale for nothing — tomorrow.*

## References and Further Reading

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## Acknowledgements

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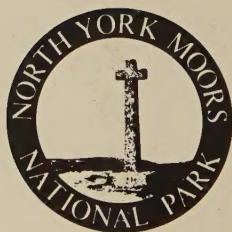
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**FRONT COVER**

A detail from "The Drovers Departure for the South,  
Scene in the Grampians" by Sir Edwin Landseer, c. 1830.

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